Speech from the Throne 2007

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Province of Newfoundland and Labrador
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by His Honour
The Honourable Edward Roberts, ONL, QC
Lieutenant Governor of
Newfoundland and Labrador

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FORWARD TO SELF-RELIANCE top

Honouring Newfoundland and Labrador's Heroes top

Mr. Speaker, Members of the House of Assembly and people of Newfoundland and Labrador:

At the outset today, I ask that we observe a minute of silence in honour of all those Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and their colleagues, who have placed their lives on the line in defence of the values we hold most dear. This year, My Government will be creating replicas of the plaques at Beaumont-Hamel bearing the names of fallen Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and erecting those plaques here at home; and will, in this context, be exploring an appropriate way of honouring those who are serving so bravely in Afghanistan. Corporal Jamie Murphy, Sergeant Vaughan Ingram, Warrant Officer Richard Nolan, Sergeant Craig Gillam, Sergeant Donald Lucas, Private Kevin Kennedy and many others have made the ultimate sacrifice in order that we, and others in our world, might enjoy the rights and freedoms that are fundamental to our human dignity. May we never forget the sacrifice they have made.

(MINUTE OF SILENCE)

A Proud Newfoundland and Labrador top

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

The colony John Guy established at Cupers Cove, or Cupids, nearly 400 years ago will, three years from now, become the focus of a Newfoundland and Labrador celebration of international significance. Preparations for Cupids in 2010 are currently underway, and My Government will be ready to invite the world to a celebration truly befitting the long, proud history and culture of Newfoundland and Labrador. There is much to celebrate, and we will not be shy in showcasing our very best.

Our best writers and musicians are showcased in many venues, most recently at the March Hare Festival in Ireland, where they regaled audiences eager to invest in our potential and promise.

We showcased our excellence on the national curling rink in February, where skip Stacie Devereaux, third Stephanie Guzzwell, second Sarah Paul, lead Julie Devereaux and coach Diane Ryan demonstrated true artistry in sport, bringing home our first Canadian junior women's victory. The Devereaux rink went on to win an impressive silver at the world junior curling championships.

We showcased our excellence on the rugby pitch as the Newfoundland Rock earned a second national victory to remain Rugby Canada Super League champions, securing their hold on the coveted MacTier Cup right here on home turf.

We also showcased our excellence in the pool as 13-year-old swimmer Katarina Roxon of Kippens broke yet another world record, this time in women's 1,500-metre freestyle in the S9 disability category, shattering the previous mark by nearly two minutes. Having represented Newfoundland and Labrador at the Canada Summer Games in Regina in 2005, she is now looking forward to representing Canada in Brazil in August at the Parapan American Games Rio 2007 and aspiring to compete at the Paralympic Games in Beijing in 2008.

In schools and arenas, in business circles and beyond, the secret is out. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have countless reasons to celebrate excellence in effort and achievement 365 days a year. The time has come to accentuate our successes and rejuvenate our pride as we set our sights on even greater victories ahead. There is no stopping a people whose hearts and minds are focused on success.

A Responsible Newfoundland and Labrador top

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

Success does not come without struggle; but it is the hope of success that makes the struggle noble and worthwhile. My Government entered office four years ago with a directive from the people to take

on significant fiscal, social and economic challenges. Although Newfoundland and Labrador had long been blessed with immeasurable resource riches and bountiful opportunities, great obstacles to self-sufficiency and prosperity stood in our way. The challenges required a bold new approach and real leadership to clear the way forward. The time had come to take our future in our own hands. The time had come to put all our strengths to work for Newfoundland and Labrador, and unite in the drive for self-reliance.

My Government did not make irresponsible promises of overnight miracles, but pledged to focus realistically on the fundamentals and lay a solid foundation on which to build a bright and secure future, brick by brick. Together, we drew a line in the sand. There would be no more giveaways, no more shortchanging our children's bright future for fleeting gain. With a clear mandate from Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, My Government moved ahead responsibly with an eight-year plan of action on which we have nearly reached the halfway mark. This plan was founded on a two-pronged approach to self-reliance: firstly, to spend more effectively the revenues we already receive and, secondly, to generate new revenues for sustainable social programs by fostering new economic growth through sound investments in infrastructure, a healthy business climate, resource development, innovation and skills. Guided by this eight-year Blueprint for Prosperity, My Government proceeded to develop a battery of strategic action plans to navigate, sector by sector and challenge by challenge, past the obstacles toward a future of promise and success. Under the leadership of my First Minister, progress on this plan is staying, not just *on* schedule, but *ahead* of schedule.

The first challenge, restoring fiscal integrity, has been a difficult exercise; but together as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians under My Government's responsible leadership, we have worked to wrestle our public finances from the pull of decline and place Newfoundland and Labrador securely on the path to fiscal freedom. The public debt My Government inherited remains unacceptably high, but through sound financial management and bold negotiating with the Government of Canada, we have given ourselves the fiscal leverage to begin lifting Newfoundland and Labrador from debt to self-reliance. Public pension liabilities have been addressed. Last year, for the first time in our history, Newfoundland and Labrador budgeted a surplus on a fully consolidated basis. All three credit rating agencies have raised our credit rating to the highest since Confederation. We are on the right track, and we are beginning to reap the benefits of living within our means.

A Self-reliant Newfoundland and Labrador top

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

Responsible management of fiscal power is indispensable to good government. It is indispensable to My Government. It establishes a foundation of trust that is at the heart of cooperation. When that trust is violated, cooperation suffers. The Federal Government has an obligation to ensure and promote equality of opportunity for all Canadians. Newfoundland and Labrador has been disparaged for accessing Canadian federal benefits and prevented from applying our natural strengths for full economic effect. We were offered new hope in 1985 when the Federal Government signed the Atlantic Accord ensuring Newfoundland and Labrador would become the principal beneficiary of the offshore resources we brought into the federation. The effect of this commitment was achieved two decades later in 2005 when My First Minister signed a renewed Atlantic Accord with the Federal Government of the day. It was a historic and defining moment in our history, which changed our course for the future. Between 2004 and 2006, the party now governing Canada promised to go a step further toward fairness by fully removing all such nonrenewable resource revenues from the equalization formula. This would have enabled Newfoundland and Labrador to convert nonrenewable oil, gas and mineral resource potential into fiscal power and invest this one-time revenue in long-lasting growth initiatives such as debt reduction, economic infrastructure development, diversification and investment attraction, without penalty. However, in its 2007 budget, the New Government of Canada reneged on this promise.

We as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians aspire, not to perpetual subservience, but to self-sufficiency. Our people are not content to tolerate a future of relying on others economically. However, our people have now also learned that we will achieve self-reliance economically only by taking charge of our future as a people. To that end, My Government will harness the desire among

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to cultivate greater cultural, financial and moral autonomy vis-à-vis Ottawa. Our priority is the well-being of successive generations of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, including those who live here now and those we welcome to join us from all over the world. My Government will affirm Newfoundland and Labrador's status as a distinct people, not uniform in lineage but multi-cultural, one nation inclusive of many nations living in harmony together. As equal partners, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal together, we will write a new future for Newfoundland and Labrador, a future of our own design, where mutual understanding, justice, equality and cooperation are the order of the day. We propose a political approach that unites our province rather than divides. We promote a positive and inviting political vision embracing all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, new and old. Our people are proud nationalists who believe it is only by affirming our identity as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that we will realize our goal of economic equality within the federation. Our people are ready to take charge of our future and, under My First Minister's leadership, our province will achieve self-reliance by becoming masters of our own house.

Through hard work over the past four years, Newfoundland and Labrador has generated the fiscal leverage and the self-confidence needed to take a bolder approach. Never before have we been in a position of such strength to take a strong stand on the national stage. My Government will continue to be assertive in holding the Government of Canada to its commitments and obligations to Newfoundland and Labrador, including its pro ises regarding 5 Wing Goose Bay and Lower Churchill development. My Government will continue to remind federal leaders that Newfoundland and Labrador has fewer federal offices than any other province and incurs significant costs as the Federal Government leaves My Government to bear the burdens of important programs such as legal aid, early learning and child care, inland fisheries enforcement and support to advance the status of women. However, as every partner in the federation should, My Government will also move forward independently to strengthen Newfoundland and Labrador's financial autonomy and fiscal capacity to meet our own obligations by diversifying and growing our own economy, reducing Newfoundland and Labrador's burden of debt on our children, pursuing a fair fiscal balance between levels of government, and reducing our dependence on equalization payments. This is My Government's pledge: We as a people will enter into agreements only when they are in our own best interests. We will set our own course. We will define our own future. Our time has arrived, and we will seize the day boldly, with confidence, conviction and a solid commitment to cooperate among ourselves in the spirit of harmony to usher in a new day of promise and prosperity for Newfoundland and Labrador.

THE WAY FORWARD top

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

The way forward for Newfoundland and Labrador requires an unyielding commitment to advance both economic growth and social development, the two pillars of a stable society. My Government will continue to move forward decisively and strategically on both fronts, building our economy while continuing to invest in the security and well-being of our people. We will achieve sustainable economic self-reliance by continuing to invest wisely in the fundamentals: infrastructure, a healthy business climate, natural resource developments, innovation and the skills of our people. In the meantime, and increasingly as our economy grows, we will invest in facilitating self-reliance for individuals and families, advancing health care and wellness for young and old, and fostering public safety and justice for one and all.

Investing in Infrastructure top

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

Investments in infrastructure are investments in economic development opportunities. Beginning in 2004, My Government invested unprecedented amounts to repair and upgrade highway infrastructure throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. Roads left to deteriorate for too long are being renewed kilometre by kilometre under a long-term plan for infrastructure stability. My Government will continue to make major investments in road work this year.

My Government commenced and completed consultations on a transportation strategy for Labrador, the region with the greatest transportation challenges. Implementation and monitoring of recommendations from the Labrador Transportation Plan have been addressed in My Government's comprehensive Northern Strategic Plan for Labrador, an unprecedented undertaking to tackle multiple challenges and seize magnificent opportunities to advance economic development and social justice in Labrador. Labrador is geographically, demographically, historically and culturally a distinct region that will play a pivotal role in shaping our collective future. We invite our vibrant Aboriginal communities to play a lead role, in partnership with all our people, in shaping a future for Labrador that truly achieves its extraordinary promise and potential. The Northern Strategic Plan has clear and achievable goals with focused priorities for Labrador over the next five years. These priorities are the products of extensive consultations and cooperation with many stakeholders, cooperation that we are eager to see continue and strengthen in the months, years and generations ahead.

In Labrador, and also on the island, hundreds of thousands of our people depend in one way or another on ferry services for transportation, business and basic commodities. The Gulf ferry service is a Constitutionally entrenched obligation of the Federal Government, whose recent decision to raise rates will affect all of us. My Government, by contrast, chose to reduce rates on intraprovincial ferry routes. Recognizing the critical importance of both the Argentia and Port aux Basques Marine Atlantic ferry routes, My Government will continue to press the Government of Canada to maintain these services with optimal schedules, modern amenities and fee structures that are reasonable, affordable and beneficial to tourism enterprises, exporters, importers and consumers. My Government, for its part, will improve reliability on intraprovincial routes by proceeding this year on the Vessel Replacement Strategy.

Economic opportunities are also advanced by improvements to infrastructure at the municipal level. My Government will continue to announce initiatives to advance rural and urban infrastructure development. A key component of such infrastructure is solid waste management; but regrettably, the provincial Solid Waste Management Strategy announced in 2002 was not funded at that time. Working with the Federal and municipal Governments, My Government successfully negotiated a plan to invest portions of gas tax revenues and municipal capital works funding to finance a new waste management system.

Investing in a Healthy Business Climate top

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

Sound infrastructure is just the beginning of My Government's actions to promote a healthy investment climate. Last year, My Government successfully launched a new brand signature that will assist in positioning Newfoundland and Labrador strategically in the competitive global marketplace as a preferred place to live, work and invest. The essence of the brand reflects the creativity of Newfoundland and Labrador's people, culture and natural environment. My Government last year also laid the foundation to develop a formal Provincial Investment Attraction Strategy. The Department of Business will soon lead a fresh new business attraction marketing campaign to raise the profile of Newfoundland and Labrador in global markets and draw investment back home.

My Government pledged to improve the investment climate by reducing the impediments to doing business in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Red Tape Reduction initiative has already reduced regulatory requirements by 8% and is well on its way to achieving the target of a 25% reduction in red tape by 2009. As part of their 35th anniversary celebrations, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business presented My Government with an award in recognition of outstanding work to reduce red tape. My Government will continue to eliminate unnecessary, burdensome regulatory requirements and continue to streamline and improve services for all clients and citizens.

Improvement initiatives being undertaken in information technology and information management within the Department of Government Services, in partnership with the Office of the Chief Information Officer, will help to strengthen and streamline the administration of public services. The objective is to increase responsiveness to the needs of citizens and business enterprises in Newfoundland and Labrador and expand the ways they can access information and government programs.

My Government will also enrich our investment climate by encouraging those from away, not only to do business in Newfoundland and Labrador, but also to make Newfoundland and Labrador their home. My Government this year launched a comprehensive Immigration Strategy to welcome people around the world to join us in making Newfoundland and Labrador a home second to none. Newfoundland and Labrador offers immigrants the best quality of life in Canada, freedom, security, economic opportunity and a sense of family. Immigrants, in turn, bring to Newfoundland and Labrador new ideas, new ways of thinking, strong connections to foreign markets and significant benefits for local communities in which they establish businesses and employ their new neighbours. Our door to newcomers is open wide and our welcome is warm and sincere.

Investing in Resource Development top

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

Our best prospects for prosperity for many generations have been our natural strengths, which give us advantages and niche opportunities that we must exploit for maximum effect. Diverse in opportunities, rural Newfoundland and Labrador is an entrepreneur's dream. We must challenge ourselves to capitalize on these opportunities with even greater ingenuity and boldness and an even greater drive to succeed because there is so much more we can achieve. My Government this fall will bring together all regional and provincial council members of the Rural Secretariat, the three orders of Government and senior public officials for a fully-interactive conference under the theme "Visions to Actions: A Roadmap to 2020". Together, those who know rural issues best will chart the best course forward, region by region, initiative by bold initiative.

Our fishing industry has long been a mainstay of rural Newfoundland and Labrador and, despite challenges in recent decades, it remains a beacon of opportunity. My Government participated with the Federal Government in a detailed review of key elements of the fishing industry in a concerted attempt to develop a comprehensive, ocean-to-plate policy framework aimed at reinvigorating this sector and placing it on a sound foundation for the future. Following extensive consultation with stakeholders throughout our province, our Governments have now identified and announced new policy directions for harvesting, processing and marketing under a coordinated Fishing Industry Renewal Strategy that charts a course for sustainability, financial self-reliance and global competitiveness. Provincial initiatives include a new processing policy renewal strategy, an enhanced fisheries loan guarantee program, a Newfoundland and Labrador Seafood Marketing Council, a voluntary fish auction, workforce adjustment, occupational health and safety initiatives, and R&D initiatives to develop new species, new products, new markets and new techniques to harvest, handle, process and market our fish resources. My Fisheries Minister's meetings with officials of the European Commission and the European Parliament and complementary interventions by the Federal Government and our fishing industry have already contributed to significant shrimp tariff reductions, which bode well for the ultimate goal of achieving market access equal to that of our key competitors. Efforts at home and abroad to promote our sealing industry factually in order to counter irrationality are working, as demonstrated by the European Commission's decision not to draft a ban on seal products.

Aquaculture has emerged as one of the fastest-growing sectors of the province's rural economy. Furthermore, Newfoundland and Labrador has some of the best remaining sites available for aquaculture development in Eastern Canada, and less than 10% of our province's potential aquaculture space is currently being utilized. Upon hearing from industry leaders that increased availability of capital was the key to industry expansion, My Government responded with new loan guarantee and capital investment programming. As a result of the program's success to date, our aquaculture industry is rapidly coming of age, creating 200 new direct full-time-equivalent jobs and an estimated 100 indirect full-time-equivalent jobs over the past year, with expectations that total salmon production will triple in the next two to three years and create 800 new jobs over the longer term. Further investments and growth are anticipated in both the salmon and mussel sectors.

Our agriculture and agrifood industry is another with proven potential to create jobs and investment in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. Ongoing initiatives of My Government have increased the rate of growth in agrifoods production value from 1% to 5% since 2003.

Our forest industry is another mainstay in many rural communities; and although affected by industry pressures gripping forestry communities across North America, My Government will continue to work with the industry, its workers and our forestry communities to enhance our competitiveness in the face of these challenges and develop a forward-looking forest industry strategy for future sustainability. When the operation at Stephenville was threatened, My Government stepped in with a significant assistance plan. My Government also stepped forward to support mill workers at Grand Falls-Windsor by standing firm in linking timber licences to the continued operation of both of the mill's paper-making machines. To place this sector on a more-secure footing for the future, My Government commissioned a comprehensive Forest Industry Competitiveness and Strategy Study last fall, mirroring My Government's earlier initiative to generate a Strategic Plan to Develop Labrador's Secondary Manufacturing and Value-Added Wood Products Industry. The industry's competitiveness has been strengthened by increased investments in silviculture, road construction, forest inventory and forest protection, and such initiatives will continue as My Government works to build upon Newfoundland and Labrador's century-old forestry legacy.

My Government this year will introduce a *Sustainable Development Act* and appoint a Round Table on Sustainable Development. My Government will also provide resources necessary to support related activities and develop a Strategic Environmental Management Plan within the next two years. Considering the magnificent natural heritage and resource base of the Corner Brook region, we fully expect the Grenfell Campus of Memorial University and the Institute for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Science to take key roles in formulating these sustainable development strategies.

Our natural heritage lures numerous tourists to Newfoundland and Labrador each year and keeps them coming back. Non-resident visits increased 5% last year as more than 494,000 tourists from away experienced first-hand the incredible gifts we have to offer. The value of their expenditures increased some 8% to $365 million. My Government's investments of more than $30 million to market and support our tourism industry during the past three years have been dollars well spent. This year, we will build on those investments through a new tourism web site, a new advertising campaign and a revamped Travel Guide that, together, will grab the attention of prospective visitors and further promote Newfoundland and Labrador on the national and international scene. My Government will also work in partnership with the Newfoundland and Labrador Outfitters Association to further develop this sector's unique niche markets.

Also building on our natural strengths is our cultural industry. Having launched Newfoundland and Labrador's first Strategic Cultural Plan last year, My Government will fuel this momentum through additional investments in the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council, the Cultural Economic Development Program, a Cultural Export Strategy and an intangible cultural heritage preservation initiative. These efforts will be complemented by investments in infrastructure, such as the Mealy Mountain Auditorium in Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

No industry offers greater promise for a self-reliant future than our energy sector. Through oil and gas, wind and hydro, we can provide energy opportunities for customers in other jurisdictions and for customers willing to grow opportunities here at home. To take maximum advantage of our energy strengths, My Government proceeded to develop a comprehensive long-term Energy Plan, a strategy that will position Newfoundland and Labrador as a warehouse of energy resources that will benefit, first and foremost, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. The Newfoundland and Labrador Energy Plan will soon be released and will mark a new era of self-confidence and promise for energy resource development in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Under the leadership of My Premier, who is Chair of both the Council of the Federation and its Energy Committee, Newfoundland and Labrador is currently working with other provinces and territories to produce a Pan-Canadian Energy Strategy. Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro already developed, on My Government's behalf, a comprehensive Lower Churchill project execution plan to achieve a project sanction date by 2009 and first power by 2015. Members of the dedicated project team are now assessing energy markets, both domestic and beyond, with a goal of meeting the critical project milestones. Consultations with the people of Labrador will continue to be a priority.

In Newfoundland and Labrador's offshore oil and gas sector, massive energy opportunities are matched by My Government's confidence that further activity will soon be occurring at Hibernia

South, White Rose and Hebron-Ben Nevis as exploration proceeds in other basins. My Government also launched industry consultations to develop an offshore natural gas royalty regime that will provide clarity to industry. This should facilitate the development of our immense natural gas resource potential in a manner that provides a fair return to industry and the people of this province.

Not only offshore but also onshore, oil and gas opportunities abound. My Government successfully negotiated with the partners at Garden Hill to recommence production in western Newfoundland, and new entrants are also prepared to invest in drilling opportunities in rural regions.

Our people also welcome onshore value-added oil and gas activities, including proposals to build a new refinery in Placentia Bay and a Liquefied Natural Gas transshipment facility near Arnold's Cove. My Government will continue to work with communities and developers with the confidence to grasp hold of opportunities in petroleum resource development, not only on the Avalon Peninsula, but right across Newfoundland and Labrador.

Rural Newfoundland and Labrador is ideally positioned to reap the benefits of growth in another natural resource sector: mineral development. The value of mineral production is projected to grow in 2007 to reach $3.3 billion, a 400% increase since 2004. Employment is projected to grow from 3,200 in 2004 to more than 3,550 in 2007. Massive iron ore production at Labrador West is now being supplemented by nickel, copper and cobalt production at Voisey's Bay, where local discoveries have generated international attention. These are not our only mining successes. The first shipment of concentrate left the Aur Resources mine at Duck Pond in January. The copper, zinc, silver and gold operation is expected to provide jobs for some 192 people. There is also great excitement about new mining developments on the Baie Verte Peninsula, in central Newfoundland and possibly in eastern Labrador. The recent import of gold ore for processing near Baie Verte offers a new opportunity for our industry, which for so long has sent its products away for processing. Mineral exploration jumped 70% from 2005 to 2006 and is expected to reach $100 million in 2007. My Government will continue to promote the growth of our mining sector through the Mineral Incentive Program and other strategic investments, recognizing that every public dollar invested in mineral exploration incentives leverages three from the private sector.

Investing in Innovation top

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

Newfoundland and Labrador's greatest natural resource is its people, and one of our people's greatest strengths is ingenuity, the capacity to create opportunity with the power of the mind. This past year, My Government released Newfoundland and Labrador's first Innovation Strategy, a carefully considered plan to increase the capacity for innovation in our economy and society to facilitate growth and prosperity. With our focus on high-growth sectors such as ocean technology, life sciences, environmental industries, and information and communication technology, My Government already launched two action initiatives under this strategy. The Commercialization Program is helping companies transform ideas into products and services. The Innovation Enhancement Program is supporting public sector institutions, not-for-profit groups, community organizations and industry associations involved in activities that are enhancing the innovation capacity of the province.

Newfoundland and Labrador is also demonstrating leadership in information and communication technologies. Recognizing the global importance of innovative technologies for future economic growth, My Government developed the Government Broadband Initiative to assist in creating a network of essential communications infrastructure to, from and through Newfoundland and Labrador, bridging the communications vacuum and linking us to the technological centres of North America. In November, under this broadband initiative, My Government announced funding for the installation of a fully redundant fibre optic link running from St. John's to Halifax along two diverse routes to connect to national carriers in mainland Canada. This fibre optic link will help bring Newfoundland and Labrador's critical infrastructure to the level of telecommunications access and capability that already exists in the rest of Canada. It is My Government's firm conviction that it would be grossly irresponsible to leave Newfoundland and Labrador behind on this front, considering the increasing global reliance on telecommunications technology. Faced with the choice between lagging behind and moving forward, My Government will consistently choose to move forward.

Through the newly-established Office of the Chief Information Officer, My Government took the initiative to bring the Newfoundland and Labrador public sector into the 21st century by implementing industry best practices in information technology, developing a legacy replacement strategy, significantly upgrading information technology infrastructure and developing an e-Government Framework that enables more and more public functions to operate more efficiently through IT systems. My Government also established a new relationship with Nati and the local IT industry by entering into major contracts for government IT services that will extend benefits to eight local IT companies.

A key growth opportunity for research and development will be the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre of Excellence for Environmental Science, Research and Technology located at Corner Brook. This Centre of Excellence is an unprecedented collaboration among innovators who are ready to position Newfoundland and Labrador as an international leader in climate-friendly green technology. These forward-thinking innovators will identify niche areas in which Newfoundland and Labrador has a competitive edge, with particular focus on forestry and freshwater ecology.

Investing in Skills top

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

A fifth pillar of a successful economy in Newfoundland and Labrador is skills development in our people, particularly those already in our education system but also those who have moved beyond school. My Government, in March of 2006, commissioned a Skills Task Force which brought together business, labour, education and other community leaders to identify the skill sets we are lacking and determine the best ways to ensure our graduates and workers are ready to seize opportunities. The task force report will be released shortly and action to implement its recommendations will begin immediately.

My Government will work more creatively and intensively with young people on income support to identify their strengths and help prepare them for gainful employment in careers that challenge and reward them. This past year, My Government successfully completed the implementation of a new province wide service delivery model with one of the objectives being to help clients make the transition from income support to work through access to education, training, career counseling and workforce assistance. My Government moved quickly to meet the needs of displaced fish plant workers through the establishment in Fortune and Marystown of career transition offices, which have served as single points of entry for access to accurate labour market information, career counseling, training and support for skills development. My Government also successfully launched a new Labour Market Division to help employers, workers, new and returning job seekers and students make informed labour market choices. Together with the business and labour sectors, My Government will find new ways to prepare young people in urban and rural centres to join the labour market and help employers train and upgrade their workforce for improved productivity and competitiveness.

The connection between education and economic growth is well established. However, many continue to face hurdles because of problems with literacy. My Government this year will enhance the Strategic Adult Literacy Plan, providing direction at the community, regional and provincial level, respecting community and cultural differences, and ensuring multiple points of entry for adults to access the support they need to master reading and writing skills.

Not only illiteracy but also innumeracy can serve as a major barrier to employment and career advancement. Advanced mathematics skills are prerequisites for many careers, particularly in the skilled trades and advanced technology sectors. Children must receive a solid grounding in math at school so they are prepared to apply those skills after graduation. The mathematics curriculum currently in our schools was introduced in Atlantic Canada beginning almost a decade ago. Our parents are saying many of their children are experiencing difficulty in mathematics at school. Examination results confirm it. It is time to take stock of what we are doing and review the curriculum, the student resources and the supports for our teachers and parents. My Government this year will undertake a comprehensive review of mathematics curriculum and will make changes wherever needed to ensure the curriculum and instruction are appropriate and effective.

My Government will also move forward early this year on the work of the Teacher Allocation Commission and the Individual Support Services Plan / Pathways Commission. My Government established these commissions to review issues identified by our teachers and parents as serious concerns. The Individual Support Services Plan / Pathways initiative in our school system is a valuable tool to develop appropriate programming to meet a student's goals and needs; but the administrative burdens on teachers have proven to be onerous. The commission is addressing ways the process can be improved so it is less burdensome while continuing to serve the needs of students. Funds will be allocated to ensure students with special needs are identified in a timely fashion so they can receive the supports they need to succeed.

My Government appointed a Teacher Allocation Commission to address the limitations of the current Teacher Allocation Formula. The review will be completed this spring. In the meantime, My Government announced an allocation of teaching units in 2007-08 to help reduce class sizes in urban areas and to maintain high quality programming in rural communities. No teaching units will be removed from the system in 2007-08; in fact, despite declining enrolment, there will be more units in the coming year than in the past year.

Nearly as important as teachers and programs are educational infrastructure and technology. To ensure the school facilities our children attend are safe and functional, My Government will invest additional funding to address maintenance issues proactively. Furthermore, this year additional investments will be made in science infrastructure, resources and professional development to build upon the laboratory safety initiative introduced last year. In an age of rapidly changing technology, it is more important than ever that today's school system remain on the leading edge to ensure the success of our graduates. This year, My Government will invest in technology supports to ensure our students have the appropriate skill sets to succeed.

Newfoundland and Labrador is fortunate to have first-rate post-secondary institutions which produce first-rate graduates. To keep and recruit skilled workers, creative measures are required. Ongoing tuition fee freezes at Memorial University and the College of the North Atlantic have been very effective in this respect. Newfoundland and Labrador has the lowest tuition rates in the country for Canadian students. Of no less importance is the fact that our public post secondary education system has received considerable attention over the last two years, first through investments included in the White Paper on Public Post secondary Education and then in Budget 2006. The Canadian Federation of Students recently invited My First Minister to address their national conference in May. Their letter of invitation stated: "Given your Government's impressive record on tuition fees and grants, we would be delighted if you were able to give the keynote address on May 24 or 25." This year, My Government will again increase operating grants for our post secondary institutions and continue the tuition freeze. My Government also began working with students and graduates to identify the best measures to address high student debt loads and will be announcing a new initiative in this year's Budget.

Investing in Personal Self-reliance top

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

Education is an economic growth issue, but a social justice issue as well. We as a society have an obligation to ensure citizens have the opportunity to harness their individual strengths and achieve their potential. Personal self-reliance is an issue of basic human dignity for young and old. We must work collectively to empower our citizens to enjoy the rewards of self-reliance. My Government last year introduced a Poverty Reduction Strategy, only the second of its kind in the country, to address the barriers to self-reliance and enhance the quality of life of our most vulnerable citizens. The president of the National Anti-Poverty Organization publicly acknowledged the organization's appreciation of My Government's efforts on poverty reduction, saying the strategy should be used as a model for a national anti-poverty strategy. The chair of the National Council of Welfare also indicated My Government's strategy should serve as a model for the rest of Canada. This cross departmental priority initiative is a comprehensive, integrated and long term effort to transform Newfoundland and Labrador from a jurisdiction with the greatest poverty challenges to one with the least. My Government, in this year's Budget, will build on the initial annualized commitment of $64 million to provide new opportunities for citizens to achieve a higher standard of living and a greater

degree of self-reliance.

Investing in Personal Health top

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

A key determinant of one's quality of life is one's personal health. We owe it to ourselves to embrace healthy living and support it as best we can. We should be especially cognizant of the importance of instilling in our young people an appreciation of the value of maximizing physical fitness. My Government already invested significantly in new physical education equipment for schools and, this year, will begin to implement a new Recreation and Sport Strategy to promote and support active living. A partnership with the Government of Canada will foster Aboriginal sport participation and promote healthy eating and physical activity. In support of our elite athletes, a new Provincial Training Centre will be completed this year to provide our best with the opportunity to train with the best and compete with the best in the country and the world, building on the legacy of our Olympians. The Recreation and Sport Strategy, however, will promote physical activity among all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, whatever their level of skill or field of interest.

It is My Government's belief that the cornerstone of many rural communities is the local school. These facilities are often the only public spaces suitable for recreation and social activities. This year, following up on a Blueprint commitment, My Government will support the sharing of school facilities with community user groups while protecting these valuable resources for our children's instruction.

It is not only how active we are but also what we eat that helps determine how fit we will be. Lifestyle choices made during our school years often remain with us throughout our lives, so it is important to instill healthy living habits in our students. Inactivity and obesity among young people are creating new health problems that are preventable through healthy living. To build on the decision last year to introduce new School Food Guidelines to promote healthy food choices, My Government this year will invest in equipment and training to further enable these guidelines to be implemented.

Not only young people but also older residents and seniors can fortify their health through the choices they make. My Government consulted with over a thousand Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in the process of developing a Healthy Aging Policy Framework and Plan to promote physical health, social health and self-reliance. Newfoundland and Labrador's seniors have provided the building blocks for the society in which we live today. The Ministerial Council on Aging and Seniors has been instrumental in identifying ways and means to make My Government and our society more responsive to the needs of seniors and more appreciative of their role.

It is My Government's conviction that seniors should be able to retain their independence to the greatest extent possible. Recognizing seniors require various degrees of care, My Government will move ahead strategically to establish and maintain long-term care facilities where our seniors can find the supportive care they need in a welcoming environment.

Collectively, we have an obligation to care properly for those among us who are ill or specially challenged. Over the last three years, My Government invested significantly to improve access to health care services in all regions. In the year ahead, My Government will continue to make strategic investments in diagnostic and medical equipment, health care services and health human resources initiatives in order to ensure Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have access to quality care, regardless of where they live. We will build on investments that have already reduced wait times for cardiac procedures, radiation treatment, sight restoration and hip and knee procedures.

Every year for the past three years, My Government increased the budget for the provincial drug program, adding effective new therapies while expanding the number of people covered through the introduction of a new low-income drug program. My Government will also continue to press the Federal Government for a National Catastrophic Drug Program that will provide equal access to drug coverage for all Canadians so that no Canadian has to be denied drug coverage because they cannot afford their prescription drugs.

Newfoundland and Labrador's investment in health care last year approached $2 billion, nearly half of all program spending. One of the challenges driving increases in health spending is the dispersal of our people along thousands of kilometres of coastline and hundreds of thousands of square kilometres of land. Investments in transportation infrastructure and services will improve our ability to serve the needs of people in remote areas while advances in information communications technology will allow health care professionals to share critical diagnostic and treatment information in real time with others many thousands of kilometres away. Our geography may be a challenge, but for My Government it will not act as a barrier to hinder the provision of health care to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Investing in Personal Security top

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

There are vulnerabilities in our society other than frailty and illness that jeopardize the personal security of our citizens. My Government will act this year on the recommendations of Dr. Peter Markesteyn and the Child and Youth Advocate on the tragic death of Zachary Turner, and the recommendations of the Right Honourable Antonio Lamer with respect to wrongful convictions. These initiatives are among My Government's highest priorities this year.

The Department of Justice will also provide leadership in enhancing community protection and safety. The proposed Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods legislation will establish a mechanism for My Government to respond to complaints and put an end to illegal activities that adversely affect or harm a neighbourhood. My Government will also continue to invest in the strength of our police forces, to which we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude for their tireless efforts to promote safety and security in our communities.

Last year, My Government introduced a Violence Prevention Initiative to reduce violence against women, children and other vulnerable populations in all regions of Newfoundland Labrador, including our rural communities. My Government will enhance its commitment to violence prevention by increasing its investments in public awareness, education and training, research, sexual assault community services, and rural regional committees; and will also fight violence against Aboriginal women and children in Aboriginal communities. The Department of Justice clearly understands the importance of responding more appropriately and effectively to the need for proper policing and justice services in Labrador. The Department of Justice will take concrete steps to improve access through developments in interpretation services, policing, family justice services and public prosecutions in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Remembering the floods at Badger and Stephenville and the events of 'nine-eleven', our people expect their Government to be ready to provide assistance when emergency or disaster situations overwhelm the capacity of individuals or communities to respond. Beginning immediately, My Government will commence implementation of an Emergency Management Strategy designed to develop and maintain a modern and robust emergency management system in collaboration with other levels of government, Crown corporations, the voluntary sector and the private sector, all of which have crucial roles to play in planning against, preparing for, responding to and recovering from emergencies and disasters.

Conclusion top

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

The initiatives and investments outlined today and detailed in the days and weeks to come will build on My Government's past investments to promote economic growth in our communities and social justice among our people. Challenges face all who would make a home in Newfoundland and Labrador, but more impressive than the challenges are the opportunities and rewards that make the struggles worthwhile. It is in our lineage to be bold, for it was the bold before us who embraced the struggles and made Newfoundland and Labrador a society of which we can be truly proud. We as bold visionaries owe it to our children to build, upon their grandparents' daring legacy, a bright future

of promise and productivity, of prosperity and self-reliance, of economic progress and social justice for one and all. We as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians share one path as joint heirs of those who started out before us; so together, with one vision to unite us, let us resolve to stay the course, to keep the faith and to keep our eyes fixed on the future that, with boldness and confidence, we are beginning to usher in throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

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Personal Reflections top

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members:

Please grant me a personal word as I conclude. This is the fifth Speech from the Throne that I have read to the House of Assembly. In all likelihood, this will be my last. The Constitution sets the term of a Lieutenant Governor at five years, an anniversary which I shall reach on the first day of next November.

I thank the Premier for his steadfast support and repeated courtesies. He and his colleagues have made my job much easier, and much more pleasant. I am grateful, too, to them and to you for the support you have provided to Government House. The building and the grounds are a national treasure, one to be cherished. Government House has been at the centre of our political and social history for nearly 180 years. It has been maintained lovingly and carefully and remains today - as it has been since 1829 - as a place of which every Newfoundlander and every Labradorian can be proud, and should feel welcome. Eve, my wife, and I have worked hard to make this so.

Lieutenant Governors are a uniquely Canadian institution. We represent the Queen, personally. We also embody the Crown, an inseparable and invaluable part of our heritage. The Crown represents all Canadians, and is a symbol of our national identity - as Canadians and as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. I have greatly enjoyed serving as the Lieutenant Governor of Newfoundland and Labrador. I have travelled widely throughout the province, and have met many thousands of people in their own communities as well as welcomed many thousands more to Government House. My respect and admiration of our people has deepened and become ever stronger. We are a vibrant people, a nation with a strong and proud history and glorious prospects. Any Newfoundlander, any Labradorian would be proud and honoured to hold this office. I have been, and I am.

One more thought, if I may. Our fellow citizens can confer no greater honour upon any of us than to send us to speak for them in this House. It is known as the people's House, where the voice of anyone and everyone can be heard. I have always admired those who seek election, and those who serve as Members. There are many ways to serve our country and our province, but there is no finer way than to be a Member of this House. Do so with pride, and be forever grateful that you have been given the opportunity to do so.

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Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

Estimates of expenditure will be laid before you in due course and you will be asked to grant supply to Her Majesty.

I invoke God's blessing upon you as you commence this new Session.

May Divine Providence guide you in your deliberation.

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